

Treo vies with BlackBerry for top spot

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Palm Treo 700w

The folks at Microsoft, never known for straying away from a fight, have been quietly working on improving its mobile windows operating system to directly challenge BlackBerry's market leadership. I recently spent a few weeks playing around with the Palm Treo 700w, one of the first smart phones to use Microsoft's new mobile operating system.

"The addition of a Treo as a licensee of Windows Mobile expands our

addressable market by delivering a Treo with an operating system already in use by many businesses. Palm's strategy is to focus on the customer and user experience -- it is about creating the best solutions for our collective customers," said Joe Fabris, director of wireless marketing for Palm Inc. "Palm has earned huge accolades for the Treo family of smartphones and it's great that Palm is delivering their hallmark features and Palm Experience on the Windows Mobile platform."

The first thing that you'll notice about the Treo 700w is how slick the design of the headset is. The phone looks like it would be heavier than necessary, but is surprisingly light and fits comfortably in your hand. When you first turn the phone on, you are hit with an interface that is cluttered, but has that familiar Windows feel, so it's easy to pick up and navigate your way around.

The phone is packed with features like built in Bluetooth capability, a full featured version of windows media player, camera and video capability, a mobile version of Microsoft Outlook, and Office which includes mobile versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. All of these included applications work almost exactly like their big brother counterparts. The question I would ask is why would you want to do all of this on a cell phone? Just because you can do something, doesn't necessary mean you should, or that people would. But then, I've never been one to get into mobile text messaging or understood why the BlackBerry is so popular in the first place.

I downloaded some video from Verizon's new Vcast service and the phone's video capability had a slight problem, the video is surprisingly crisp and clean when downloaded in its original file format, the problem is the Treo's 240/240 screen size is a different shape than the standard 340/240 size so the video gets distorted when you zoom it to fit the rather large screen. This aside, I really liked the Windows Mobile Operating system and the concept behind having Windows Mobile act

and navigate almost exactly like the full version.

"Overall there has been an enormous shift of momentum toward more open platform solutions versus proprietary solutions to provide email to consumers and businesses," Fabris said. "Palm's e-mail strategy is all about choice, which is why many customers have been drawn to us. We've delivered on a strategy that offers solutions ranging from everyday POP3 and IMAP solutions like Yahoo and AOL, to enterprise-ready solutions from Microsoft, Good, Seven, Intellisync and more."

One neat feature of the Treo phone is the Airport mode, where you have the option of using the phone's wireless functions or shutting them off, and just using the phone's PDA functions. This means that theoretically you'll be able to use your cell phones on airplanes. I can easily see Airline employees still telling you to turn your phone off, but it's a very nice option.

The number one problem with the phone was the appalling lack of battery life. There were times when the phone's battery barely lasted an hour or two, other times I charged up the phone, turned it off and the battery would still be dead the next time I went to use the phone. It appears that the phone is still functioning at some level, even with it turned off. This begs the question -- with phones becoming more and more robust, are they becoming overly complex?

"As carriers start to deploy 3G networks that deliver speeds that exceed landline DSL, the challenge for device makers will be to deliver a product that can harness these speeds and at the same time keep the user experience easy and intuitive," said Fabris. "We have a track record of doing just that, and these are Palm's core strengths -- ease of use and the customer experience. It's easy to deliver a phone, it's not so easy to deliver a smartphone, which is what carriers want and users are demanding."

Overall, the Treo 700w is a very nice phone and a good alternative to the BlackBerry, the phone has just about every feature that you could ask for, but at almost \$500 those bells and whistles don't come cheap.

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